

TO: Chairman and Members

DATE: November 18, 2010

SUBJECT: Probation Officer Core Course Revision Project

AGENDA ITEM: D

RESOURCE PERSON: Kasey Stevens

ACTION: INFORMATION: X

Summary:

This agenda item provides information on the Probation Officer (PO) Core Course Revision project conducted by the Corrections Standards Authority's (CSA) Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) division.

Background:

The PO Core Course provides basic training to newly hired entry-level Probation Officers. The training is intended to provide Probation Officers with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job at the level of competence expected of a Probation Officer in the first year of employment. STC develops the PO Core Course to provide a framework which is flexible in order to meet the needs of Probation Departments across California. Providers then use this basic framework to develop a PO Core Course that meets STC's requirements but can also be tailored to meet agency specific needs.

The PO Core Course in use today was developed in 1998 and implemented in 1999. In order to update the course and incorporate any changes in the field of probation over the last ten years, STC began the process of revising the PO Core Course in February of 2009. The revision incorporated empirically-based research of the Probation Officer job through a variety of means including surveys and task force meetings with probation officers, supervisors, managers, Chief Probation Officers, and training managers. As a result of this research, the new PO Core Course Manual was finalized in November of 2010. The following sections describe the revision process and summarize the changes that were made to the curriculum.

Revision Process:

The PO Core Course Revision was divided into the following three phases: initial information gathering, curriculum revision, and review and distribution. The initial information gathering phase was initiated in March of 2009. During this phase, information about the PO Core Course and the Probation Officer job was incorporated from the most recent job analysis and from various constituents of the course. Constituent surveys were developed to obtain feedback about the 1999 curriculum and identify new topics, knowledge or skills which needed to be added to the course. These constituent surveys were completed by Probation Officers who graduated from a PO Core Course in the last two years, Chief Probation Officers, supervisors, managers, training managers, training providers and instructors. Additionally during this phase, representatives of CPOC, the Chief Probation Officers of California, were provided with a review of the research that was going to be conducted to revise the course. This phase was concluded in June of 2009.

The curriculum revision phase was initiated in July of 2009. This phase consisted of identifying the topics for the course and developing the course objectives. In order to accomplish this task, a total of 7 task force meetings were held at the CSA. These task force meetings included 50 task force participants who were selected, with the approval of Chief Probations Officers, to represent

probation departments across the state. During this phase Chief Probation Officers were also provided with an update on the course revision and an opportunity to provide feedback via an online webinar. This phase was concluded in July of 2010.

The review and distribution phase was initiated in August of 2010. During this phase, both task force participants and Chief Probation Officers were provided with an opportunity to review the draft of the revised PO Core Course Manual and to submit feedback or suggest changes to the CSA. First, task force participants reviewed the draft of the PO Core Course Manual to ensure that their recommendations and suggestions provided to the CSA during the task force meeting were accurately captured. The draft of the PO Core Course Manual was then provided to all Chief Probation Officer for review. Chiefs submitted their comments to the CSA and an online webinar was held to review their comments. After reviewing the Chief Probation Officer comments, the manual was finalized. The PO Core Course revision was completed in November of 2010.

The new 2010 PO Core Course Manual was published on the CSA's website in November and STC participating agencies were notified of its release via an STC bulletin. Starting July 1, 2011, STC will only certify courses based on the new 2010 manual. This will allow core training providers time to prepare and certify the revised course. However, training providers can voluntarily implement the revised course prior to July of 2011. Additionally, during the certification process, STC will request more detailed information from training providers regarding how each objective will be achieved. The STC Core Course Manager will provide training regarding the new certification requirements to each training provider.

Changes to the Curriculum:

The intent of the course revision was to improve the course by adding necessary content, removing or decreasing the emphasis of content, removing redundancy, increasing flexibility in the course, clarifying the intended outcome of the course, and adding user-friendly features to the manual. As a result, a number of significant changes were made to the length, structure, and content of the course.

The length of the course was increased to 196 hours from 174 hours. This increase in hours is a result of:

- adding an introduction to evidence-based practices, interviewing, and assessment tools.
- adding physical conditioning to prepare students for defensive tactics training and to assist in reducing injuries.
- increasing the time allocated to defensive tactics training.

Several structural changes were made to clarify the intended outcome of the course, increase flexibility in the course, and add user-friendly features to the manual. As a result, (a) the student performance objectives in the manual focus on the knowledge or abilities of the student at the completion of each module, (b) content previously provided in the separate knowledge skill map document is provided directly in the manual, and (c) flexibility in the course sequence was identified.

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The focus of the content changes described below was to update the core course in order to reflect changes in the field of probation since the development of the previous course in 1998. As a result, new content was added to the course, some content was removed or given less emphasis, and redundancy was removed. The following content changes were made:

- A new 10 hour unit was added to provide an introduction to evidence-based practices, assessment tools, interviewing techniques, and disproportionate minority contact.
- The amount of instructional time devoted to gangs, family violence, psychological problems, substance abuse, and sex offenders was increased by 10 hours.
- Case planning and supervision topics were designed to reduce redundancy and clarify the previous content regarding casework and monitoring probationer performance.
- Physical conditioning was added to the course in order to prepare students for defensive tactics and reduce injuries.
- The amount of time devoted to officer safety was increased by 8 hours. The defensive tactics maneuvers were written to provide flexibility for instructors to incorporate agency specific techniques and philosophies when possible.
- The CPR and first aid requirement was eliminated from the course, allowing agencies to satisfy this requirement at the local level. However, all entry-level POs must successfully complete CPR and first aid courses within the first year of employment.

Recommendation/Action Needed:

Information only.